

## Bases of political judgments: the role of stereotypic and non-stereotypic information

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BASES OF POLITICAL JUDGMENTS:  
The Role of Stereotypic and  
Non-stereotypic Information

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BASES OF POLITICAL JUDGMENTS:

The Role of Stereotypic and Non-stereotypic Information

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## Bases of Political Judgments:

### The role of stereotypic and nonstereotypic information

#### Abstract

Three experiments investigated the role of stereotypic and nonstereotypic criteria in judgments of political candidates. The effects of physical attractiveness, political party and stands on specific issues on both absolute and comparative judgments of political candidates were examined to evaluate three hypotheses about stereotype and attribute use. In the absence of other information, candidates' physical attractiveness (conveyed through photographs) had a substantial influence on subjects' global evaluations of them and inferences of both their personal qualities and their political ideology. When other information about the candidates' party membership and stands on specific issues were available, however, the candidate's attractiveness had no affect on the evaluations of them. When subjects made judgments of only one candidate, subjects relied exclusively upon the candidate's voting record. When subjects were asked to make comparative judgments of two candidates, however, they based their judgments on each candidate's party membership and not their respective voting records. Implications of these results for the processes that underlie political judgments and decisions are evaluated.

## Introduction

The criteria that are used to evaluate political candidates are a central concern of research and theory in the area of political judgment. Early research focused largely on the effects of party affiliations, issue positions, and incumbency (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954; Hinkley, 1981; Hinkley, Hofstetter, & Kessel, 1974; Markus & Converse, 1979; Rabinowitz, 1978; Repass, 1971; Weisberg & Rusk, 1970). More recent studies, however, have begun to explore the role of candidates' personal characteristics (Kinder & Abelson, 1981; Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk, 1986) and personal appearance (Rosenberg, Bohan, McCafferty, & Harris, 1986; Rosenberg and McCafferty, 1987). Not surprisingly, these investigations demonstrate that these characteristics often do influence judgments of political candidates. How the different types of information combine to affect voting preferences, however, is surprisingly unclear. Equally unclear are the factors that determine when and under what conditions each type of information is used, and the judgmental processes that underlie its impact. The present paper is concerned with identifying these conditions.

It seems reasonable to suppose that political judgments, especially evaluations of politicians and candidates for political office, are often influenced by stereotypes (see Rahn, 1989). Stereotypes are often used to simplify the complex social environment in which we live (Hamilton, 1981). The effect of stereotype-based criteria also depends on the context in which

information is received and judgments are made (Bodenhausen and Wyer, 1985). In politics, this effect may depend not only on the type and implications of other information available about the candidates to be evaluated, but also on the nature of the judgment task itself (e.g., the number of candidates to be evaluated and whether absolute or comparative judgments are made). The use of stereotypes may also affect decision outcomes by affecting the basis on which those decisions are made (cf. Sniderman, Glaser and Griffin, 1990, who discuss the relative influence of the criteria by focusing on different groups of voters, the well informed and the less informed, and two decision strategy modes, the incumbent referendum and the simultaneous comparison of incumbent and challenger). For example, a voter may vote for Candidate A if using issue stands as the criteria, but vote for Candidate B if using party affiliation as the decision criteria.

To examine the use of stereotypes in making judgments about political candidates, three studies were conducted. The first study demonstrated the effect of physical attractiveness on candidate evaluations when no other judgment-relevant information is available. The remaining studies examined the combined effects of (a) candidate attractiveness, (b) party membership, and (c) candidate voting record on judgments of a single candidate (Experiment 2) and comparative judgments of two candidates (Experiment 3).

#### The Role of Stereotypes

Some stereotypes are likely to be activated by a candidate's party affiliation. Republicans, for example, may be stereotyped as conservatives who support a defense buildup, and Democrats as liberals who support social welfare programs. These stereotypes can be used to infer whether a particular party member's political and social orientation is similar to one's own and, therefore, desirable. This inference, in turn, could influence voting decisions independently of other available information about the candidate (Conover and Feldman, 1986; Rahn, 1989).

A candidate's personal appearance can also activate a social stereotype, features of which are then used to infer other attributes of the candidate. The existence of such a stereotype is suggested by evidence that physically attractive individuals are generally inferred to have more desirable personality traits, and to achieve greater vocational success, than are unattractive persons (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). In the political arena, physical attractiveness may be stereotypically associated with attributes of an effective legislator (trustworthiness, competence, etc.) (Rosenberg, et al., 1986). These inferred attributes, which in combination constitute the candidate's "image," have been shown to have an important impact on voting decisions (Kinder, 1986; Miller, Wattenburg and Malanchuk, 1986).

A candidate's issue stands provide a direct indication of the extent to which the candidate shares one's own political perspective in particular issue and policy areas (Page and Brody, 1972). In some instances, a candidate's stand on a specific

issue may be regarded as particularly important. In such instances, it may be a sufficient basis for deciding whether to vote for him.<sup>1</sup> More generally, however, a mental computation of a candidate's overall similarity to oneself along various issue dimensions requires much more cognitive effort than does an inference of these characteristics from party membership, and perhaps candidate image.

The relative influence of stereotype-based criteria (candidate party and image) and agreement with individual issue positions are likely to depend on the type of judgment to be made. In fact, three quite different hypotheses concerning these effects seem viable.<sup>2</sup>

Default hypothesis. According to the default hypothesis, stereotypes will only be used when no other information is available. When other information (attribute) is presented as well, the implications of the stereotype are ignored. Locksley and her colleagues (Locksley, Borgida, Brekke, & Hepburn, 1980; Locksley, Hepburn, & Ortiz, 1982) found that subjects used gender stereotypes as bases for trait judgments (assertiveness versus passivity) only when no other, more directly relevant information was available. When individuating behaviors with direct implications for the judgments were described, however, this information was used and stereotypes had no effect on these judgments.

Independent attribute hypothesis. Research using different judgment tasks suggests that the implications of available

stereotypes may combine additively with those of other relevant attributes to effect evaluations. Futoran and Wyer (1986) and Deaux and Lewis (1984) both found that when subjects were asked to evaluate a person's suitability for a gender-stereotyped occupation, the person's gender functioned as an attribute of the job candidate that affected judgments independently of and in addition to other judgment-relevant attributes.

Heuristic hypothesis. Finally, stereotypic information might be used as a heuristic in decision-making. In other words, regardless of what other attribute information is available, the stereotype will be used as a "cognitive shortcut" to the judgment. Bodenhausen and Wyer (1985) found that subjects used individuating background information to assess a person's responsibility for a crime when the person's ethnicity (a racial stereotype) was unknown. However, the availability of a crime-relevant stereotype (activated by the person's name) led subjects to ignore the individuating information and rely on the stereotype instead.

The default and heuristic hypotheses seem quite contradictory. Later research by Bodenhausen and Lichtenstein (1987) delineated the conditions in which those hypotheses are applicable. Specifically, subjects who anticipated making a simple (i.e., trait) judgment appeared to search for and use information that bore directly on the judgment without considering the implications of stereotype-activated knowledge. When subjects anticipated making a complex judgment that



potentially required an assessment and integration of several different types of information, however, they were inclined to avoid this cognitive effort and to use stereotype-based criteria that were easier to apply. Consequently, specific trait-related information about the person, although relevant to the judgment, had little effect.

These alternative hypotheses can be applied to political judgments as well. That is, people who are asked to judge a political candidate may consider his stands on specific issues to have direct implications for whether the candidate shares their social and political perspective. Therefore, they may use this information, if available, rather than more global, stereotype-based criteria (the default hypothesis). Extending these conditions to politics, for example in a congressional race where the only information a voter has is the party affiliation of the two candidates, the voter will make her decision on the basis of the implications of the stereotype she holds of the two parties.

Suppose, however, that citizens expect an overall assessment of the implications of the candidate's issue stands to be difficult. Then, they might resort to stereotype-based criteria without considering these implications, as suggested by the heuristic hypothesis and by Bodenhausen and Lichtenstein's findings. For example, in some congressional races the voters have lots of information about both candidates, but this may make it difficult for the voter to come to a decision. So instead of trying to make sense of all the information and using a long

complicated decision calculus, the voter may simply vote for the "nicest," most likeable candidate.

On the other hand, evaluations of political candidates could be more akin to judgments of occupational suitability, such as hiring decisions. Then, as suggested by Futoran and Wyer (1986), the independent attribute hypothesis could apply. For example, in a congressional race where voters not only have information about the candidates' party affiliation, but also image and issue information, the voter will "add" the implications of these pieces of information together in order to arrive at a decision.

#### Comparative versus Absolute Judgment Situations

In most previous research on social judgments, individual persons are evaluated in isolation. Given limited amounts of information about a single candidate, the judgment should be relatively simple. Under this condition, subjects might use the individuating (issue stand) information, as suggested by the default hypothesis. Alternatively, they might use the available stereotypes (party and image) in addition to the individuating information, as suggested by the independent attribute hypothesis.

Many political judgments, however, are inherently comparative, involving an assessment of the relative merits of two or more alternative candidates. The process of making comparative judgments may differ considerably from that underlying the judgments of single stimuli (Herstein, 1981; Montgomery, 1983). The strategy used and the type of information

considered may be quite different (cf. Sniderman et al., 1990). Also, a comparative judgment potentially requires a consideration of more information than does a single-candidate judgment. For this reason alone, it may be more cognitively demanding. To this extent, subjects may be more inclined to use stereotype-related criteria as a heuristic when they make comparative judgments than when they evaluate a single candidate in isolation. The decision that results from this comparison process may not always be predictable from differences in the subjects' overall evaluations of each candidate considered separately (Ottati & Wyer, 1990). To examine these possibilities, both types of judgment situations were investigated in the studies to be reported.

#### EXPERIMENT 1

The effects of political party membership and issue positions on candidate evaluations are well documented (cf. Asher, 1983). The influence of our physical attractiveness manipulation on these evaluations seemed important to confirm, however. Therefore, Experiment 1 had two purposes. First, it provided insight into the types of inferences that are made on the basis of a candidate's physical attractiveness alone. Second, it was designed to select the attractive and unattractive stimulus photographs for use in the other experiments to be reported.

#### Method

Fourteen slides, each showing a head-and-shoulders portrait of a middle-aged white male (see Footnote 1), were reproduced

from photographs in a professional photography album. These slides were presented to a total of 121 University of Illinois undergraduates (run in three groups of approximately 40 students each) with instructions that (a) each picture was of a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives, (b) although people "sometimes have very little information about candidates beyond seeing them in a picture, their perceptions of the candidates can be surprisingly accurate," and (c) they should consider each picture as it was presented and rate the candidate portrayed along eight scales. These scales were intended to assess three different types of attributes.

1. Overall image. On an 11-point (0 - 10) scale, ranging from "not at all" to "very much", subjects were asked to indicate whether, in general, the person conveyed "an image of the sort of person you would want to represent you in the U.S. Congress."

2. Personal characteristics. Subjects estimated (on the same 11-point scale) the extent to which the person was (a) trustworthy, (b) likeable, (c) competent, (d) high in leadership ability, and (e) attractive.

3. Political ideology. Subjects estimated the extent to which the person was both (a) politically liberal and (b) politically conservative.

After rating all 14 candidates, subjects completed a short background questionnaire. One item in this questionnaire asked the respondents to indicate their own political orientation by checking an alternative along a 7-alternative scale from

"strongly liberal" to "strongly conservative," with the midpoint labeled "moderate." Subjects were classified as liberal if they were below the midpoint and as conservative if they placed themselves above it.

### Results

Mean ratings of the 14 candidates along the 0-10 scale of attractiveness ranged from 1.1 to 6.6. None of the candidates, therefore, was highly attractive. This probably reflects two factors. First, all candidates were middle-aged (over 40 years old) whereas the subjects we used were 18-20 years old. Second, the photographs/slides were black and white and not in "living" color. The range in attractiveness was nevertheless quite sufficient to permit us to investigate the role of physical attractiveness in judgments of other attributes.

Because no political information about the candidate was given, judgments of a candidate's image and personal characteristics were expected to be independent of subjects' political views. On the other hand, inferences about the candidate's political ideology were expected to depend on whether subjects themselves were liberal or conservative. Each set of judgments will be considered separately.

#### Image and Personal Characteristics

Judgments of each candidate's image, and specific personal attributes were averaged over subjects ( $n = 121$ ). These mean judgments were then correlated over the 14 candidates with the mean estimate of each candidate's physical attractiveness.

Estimates of candidates' attractiveness were strongly correlated with estimates of the extent to which candidates conveyed an image of the sort of person subjects would want to represent them in Congress ( $r = .81$ ) as well as with estimates of trustworthiness ( $r = .67$ ), likableness ( $r = .83$ ), competence ( $r = .78$ ) and leadership ability ( $r = .90$ ); in each case,  $p < .01$  ( $n = 14$ ).

These relations can also be seen from Table 1, which shows mean ratings of the three most attractive and three least attractive candidates. For each trait, the three attractive candidates were rated above the midpoint of the 10 point scale and the three unattractive candidates were rated below the midpoint. Each difference is significant ( $p < .01$ ). (The six photographs used to portray these candidates were selected for use as stimuli in the other two experiments to be reported.)

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 Insert Table 1 about here  
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### Political Ideology

Candidates' physical attractiveness also affected subjects' perceptions of the candidates' political ideology. Table 2 shows subjects' mean estimates of the liberalness and conservatism of the three most attractive and three least attractive candidates as a function of their own political orientation (as inferred from their self ratings). Liberal subjects rated the attractive candidates as more liberal and less conservative than the

unattractive candidates. In contrast, conservative subjects rated the attractive candidates as less liberal and more conservative than the unattractive ones. This conclusion is confirmed by interactive effects of the candidate's attractiveness and subjects' own political orientation on judgments of both liberalness,  $F(1,100) = 19.79$ ,  $p < .01$ , and conservatism,  $F(1,100) = 15.08$ ,  $p < .01$ .

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Insert Table 2 about here

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In summary, in the absence of any direct information about candidates' political views or personal qualities, subjects rated attractive candidates as possessing attributes that would make them effective legislators, as conveying the image of someone they would like to represent them in Congress, and as having a political ideology similar to their own. These results are therefore consistent with the assumption that a physical attractiveness stereotype exists that influences judgments of political candidates with respect to attributes that have implications for their effectiveness as legislators as well as their political orientation.<sup>3</sup>

## EXPERIMENT 2

The finding that candidates' physical attractiveness affected judgments of them when no other information was available is not too surprising. Experiment 2 examined the effects of the physical attractiveness stereotype when other

information about the candidate was provided as well. Specifically, subjects evaluated a current member of the U.S. House of Representatives who was running for the Senate. Three types of information were presented: a photograph of the candidate that was either attractive or unattractive, the candidate's party membership (Republican or Democrat), and the candidate's votes on a series of hypothetical House bills (which conveyed either a generally liberal or a generally conservative orientation).

Several possible effects were considered. According to the independent attribute hypothesis, all three factors should combine additively to affect judgments. According to the default hypothesis, however, only candidate issue stands, which are the most direct indication of the candidate's similarity to the subject in social values and political views, will have an influence, and the categorical criteria will be ignored. Finally, the heuristic hypothesis implies that candidates' party and attractiveness should influence judgments but the candidate's issue stands should not.

#### Method

##### Subjects and Design

Subjects received stimulus information about a political candidate consisting of (a) a photograph of the candidate (attractive vs. unattractive), (b) the candidate's party membership (Democrat vs. Republican) and (c) the candidate's voting record (liberal vs. conservative). This information was



varied over experimental conditions in a 2x2x2 between-subjects design. Two hundred introductory political science students participated in the study during a class period, 25 of whom were randomly assigned to each condition.

### Procedure

The materials were administered in the context of a larger battery of questionnaires that were ostensibly intended to assess the attitudes and opinions of university college students. (The sections of the test battery that preceded these materials were not expected to interfere appreciably with the candidate judgment task to be performed.) Subjects were introduced to this part of the battery with instructions that we were interested in how people evaluate political candidates, and that they would receive information about a past member of the U.S. House of Representatives who had recently run for the Senate. On this pretense, subjects were given a one-page information sheet about the candidate describing one of the 8 combinations of party membership, voting record, and attractiveness. This sheet was constructed as follows.

Party membership. At the top of the information sheet the candidate was labeled as either a Democrat or a Republican.

Voting record. The liberalness or conservatism of the candidate's stand on various issues was conveyed by his votes on 10 fictitious House bills. Of these, four pertained to issues that had no clear ideological implications (e.g., a proposal to establish the rose as the national flower). Six others pertained

to issues that had been determined (in a previous study) to have clear liberal or conservative implications. These bills, each of which was identified by a number (e.g., HB126) to increase the credibility of our cover story, were worded as follows:

1. Proposal to decrease the U.S. involvement in the internal affairs of Central America.
2. Proposal to increase financial support for government sponsored health and social welfare problems.
3. Proposal to increase military spending by 15 percent.
4. Proposal for the establishment of government programs to increase the economic status of women.
5. Proposal to allow prayer in public schools.
6. Proposal to provide incentives for the construction of future nuclear power plants.

All ten bills were presented on a single sheet of paper, each accompanied by an indication of how the candidate had voted. All candidates voted identically on the four neutral bills. Liberal-voting candidates voted in favor of the first, second, and fourth bills listed above, and against the remaining ones. Conservative-voting candidates voted exactly the opposite on these six bills.

Attractiveness. Each candidate's physical attractiveness was conveyed through one of the six photographs selected on the basis of judgment data obtained in Experiment 1. Specifically, a 2" by 2-1/2" photograph of either an attractive or an unattractive person (see Table 1) was provided in the upper-right

hand corner of the information sheet. (The three photographs of each type were presented with about equal frequency in all conditions.)

### Judgments

Candidate evaluations. On the page following the information sheet, subjects were asked to evaluate the candidate using a "feeling thermometer" similar to that employed in the American National Election Studies.

Specifically, subjects were told to:

"...rate the candidate using the 'feeling thermometer.'  
You may use any number from 0 to 100 for the rating.  
Ratings between 50 and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Ratings between 0 and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the person and that you don't care too much for the person. Please write the appropriate number here \_\_\_\_\_."

Subjects' party preference and voting orientation. After completing the thermometer measure, subjects indicated how they would personally have voted on each house bill, and then answered a series of background questions. These questions included a 7-category measure of party allegiance. This latter scale ranged from "strong Democrat" to "strong Republican," with the midpoint labeled "independent."

### Results and Discussion

Subjects were expected to be more positively disposed toward candidates whose party membership was the same as their own, and toward candidates whose votes on issues coincided with their own issue positions, than toward candidates who differed from them in these respects. Therefore, the characteristics of each candidate were recoded in terms of these variables, based on subjects' post-judgment ratings of their own party preference and their own voting preference on the specific bills being considered.

Specifically, subjects were classified as Democrats or Republican, depending on whether their rating of their party preference was above or below the scale midpoint.<sup>4</sup> The party of the candidate rated by the remaining subjects was then recorded as either the same as or different from that of the subject's.

Subjects' voting preferences on the six ideology-related bills were compared to those of the candidate they considered. The candidate was classified as similar to the subject if the subject agreed with his votes on more than 3 of the six bills, and as dissimilar if the subject disagreed with his votes on more than 3 of the six bills.<sup>5</sup>

Mean thermometer ratings of candidates were analyzed as a function of their physical attractiveness, party membership (same as vs. different from the subject's) the implications of the candidate's voting record (similar vs. dissimilar to the subject in issues). The implications of these results are very clear. Subjects evaluated a candidate more favorably if they agreed with

a majority of his issue positions (votes) ( $\bar{M} = 67.6$ ) than if they disagreed with the candidate on a majority of his issue votes ( $\bar{M} = 48.8$ ),  $F(1,148) = 47.59$ ,  $p < .01$ . However, no other main nor interaction effects reached significance. That is, subjects did not judge a candidate any more favorably if he belonged to the same party than if he belonged to a different party (57.2 vs. 54.5). Moreover, they judged attractive candidates slightly less favorably than unattractive ones (53.8 vs. 58.1).

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 Insert Table 3 about here  
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Of the three alternative hypotheses suggested by previous research on the role of stereotypes in social judgment, these results are most consistent with the default hypothesis. Although physical attractiveness had a substantial effect on candidate evaluations when no other information was provided (Experiment 1), neither attractiveness nor party membership had any effect when the candidate's stands on specific issues were conveyed. This pattern of results clearly does not support the independent attribute hypothesis. Nor is it compatible with the heuristic hypothesis, which implies that stereotype-based criteria should be applied. As noted earlier, however, subjects may resort to the use of stereotypes as a heuristic basis for judgments only when they anticipate that the judgment task will be difficult (Bodenhausen & Lichtenstein, 1987). Perhaps subjects found it quite easy to make a judgment on the basis of

the limited number of issue stands conveyed in this study, and so they were not motivated to apply more general, stereotype-based criteria. It may, therefore, be premature to dismiss the heuristic hypothesis entirely. This will become clear presently.

### EXPERIMENT 3

We noted earlier that the judgments people make during an election are typically comparative. Subjects may adopt a quite different judgment strategy when they are required to compare two candidates than when they make judgments of a single candidate in isolation. They may perform an intercandidate, dimension-by-dimension comparison of the alternative candidates (Herstein, 1981; see Montgomery, 1983, for a discussion of specific analysis), as might be inferred from the integration hypothesis. Or, as the default hypothesis suggests, candidates may be compared only on the basis of their issue stands, consistent with the results of Experiment 2.

The heuristic hypothesis, on the other hand, would predict physical attractiveness and party membership to have greater effects than they have on judgments of a single candidate. There are two, related, reasons for this difference. First, comparative judgments made on the basis of issue stands requires a consideration of twice as much information when two candidates are judged rather than one. Second, an issue-by-issue comparison of candidates' stands on specific issues, and an assessment of their combined implications for which candidate is more likely to

share one's personal perspective, is cognitively demanding. Thus, subjects may be more inclined to distinguish between the candidates in terms of simpler, categorical criteria than they are when only candidate is considered (Bodenhause & Lichtenstein, 1987).

## Method

### Subjects and Design

Subjects were asked to compare two candidates. The first candidate represented one of eight possible combinations of physical attractiveness (attractive vs. unattractive) x candidate issue stands (conservative vs. liberal) x candidate party (Democrat vs. Republican). The second candidate differed from the first along all three dimensions with the order of candidate presentation balanced. Subjects were 538 introductory political science students who participated during a class period. These subjects were assigned randomly to each of the eight design cells.

### Procedure

The materials for the experiment were presented as part of a larger test battery similar to that employed in Experiment 2. The instructions to subjects were similar to those given in the second experiment. In this case, however, subjects were told that they would receive information about two candidates who had run against one another for a seat in the U.S. Senate, and that they would be asked to indicate which of the two candidates they

preferred. Subjects were given two information sheets, one pertaining to each of the two candidates they were assigned. (Each sheet was identical to one of those used in Experiment 2.) As noted previously, the first sheet described a candidate representing one of the eight possible combinations of physical attractiveness, party and voting record, and the second described a candidate that differed from the first along each of the three dimensions.

After subjects read the two sets of information, the information sheets were collected and subjects were given a candidate rating form. First, subjects indicated which of the two candidates they would vote for.<sup>6</sup> Then, they evaluated each candidate separately using the "feeling thermometer" employed in Experiment 2. Finally, subjects completed a background questionnaire indicating their own party preference and issue positions. These measures were used as a basis for inferring each candidate's similarity to the subject as in Experiment 2.

### Results

Subjects' judgments of each candidate were analyzed separately as a function of party similarity, issue-vote similarity, and the candidate's physical attractiveness. (The design precluded a combined analysis of ratings from both candidates.) These results are reported below for each set of judgments in turn.

#### Candidate Evaluations

Subjects' favorableness ratings of the first and second



candidates presented (Candidates 1 and 2, respectively) are shown in Table 4. Specifically, subjects liked the candidates more if they belonged to the subjects' own party than if they belonged to a different one (for Candidate 1,  $F(1,483) = 22.36$   $p < .0001$ ; for Candidate 2,  $F(1,433) = 20.26$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). Thus, party affiliation was brought to bear on judgments of the candidates. In contrast, the effects of issue voting similarity and candidate image were not significant nor were any interactions involving these variables ( $p > .10$ ).

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 Insert Table 4 about here  
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#### General Discussion

The results of our three studies can be easily summarized. Candidates' physical attractiveness (as conveyed by photographs) affected judgments of them in the absence of any other information about them. However, these effects were eliminated when more specific indications of the candidates' political orientation and voting stands were available. The effects of other criteria depended on the type of judgment that subjects were asked to make. Specifically, subjects based their judgments of a single candidate on the candidate's stands on specific issues and ignored the implications of his party membership. When subjects were asked to make comparative judgments, however, they based their evaluations of each candidate on the candidate's party affiliation and ignored the implications of his issue

stands. Thus, the criteria that subjects used depended, at least in part, on the type (complexity) of the judgmental task.

These conclusions bear on several alternative hypotheses concerning the determinants of political judgments and the processes that underlie their influence. For example, physical attractiveness and party membership in these experimental conditions, do not appear to combine additively with issue information to affect judgments in the manner implied by the independent attribute hypothesis. Rather, the use of different judgmental criteria depends on the other information available and on whether candidates are considered in isolation or in relation to another.

When subjects received information about a single candidate and considered him independently of other, alternative candidates, they appear to base their judgments on the extent to which the candidate shares their personal views and ignore the global, stereotype-related criteria. This tendency is compatible with the default hypothesis. However, when subjects were asked to make a comparative evaluation of two candidates, they may anticipate that a such a judgment on the basis of issue stands will be difficult. Consequently, they may resort to the use of simplifying stereotype-based criteria to the exclusion of more specific issue information. Under these conditions the heuristic hypothesis appears applicable. This conclusion is consistent with that drawn by Bodenhausen and Lichtenstein (1987) in a different judgment domain.

The difference in judgmental criteria employed under absolute and comparative judgment conditions is not self-evident. It is certainly reasonable on a priori grounds to suppose that when subjects are confronted with a comparative judgment, they first compute an evaluation of each candidate separately on the basis of the information provided, and then compare the candidates with respect to these two summary evaluations. If this had been the case, however, subjects' judgments in Experiment 3 should have been based on the same criteria subjects employed in Experiment 2 (i.e., the candidate's voting record alone). Thus, this strategy does not appear to have been applied.

A related implication of our results is that once subjects had made a comparative judgment of the two candidates on the basis of their party membership, they later used the implications of this judgment to evaluate each candidate individually rather than reviewing their memory for the original information they had received about the candidate's issue stands. Other studies also suggest that once subjects judge people or objects to have a particular attribute or to belong to a particular category, they use these judgments and their implications as a basis for later inferences without reassessing the implications of the information upon which the initial judgments were based (cf. Carlston, 1980; Sherman, Ahlm, Berman, & Lynn, 1978; for a theoretical analysis of this phenomenon, see Wyer & Srull, 1989).

In the present context, this has interesting implications.

Suppose subjects employ different judgment strategies in making comparative judgments (Experiment 3) than in judging a candidate in isolation (Experiment 2), and use different criteria in arriving at these judgments. Then, not only will subjects' overall evaluations of the candidates depend on which type of judgment is made, but judgments of the candidate along dimensions to which the original information is objectively irrelevant might be affected as well.

### Conclusions

The results reported in our experiments have implications for many conditions that arise outside the laboratory, such as information about a candidate that is conveyed in a newspaper or campaign brochure. Additional research must be performed, however, to assess the generalizeability of their implications for other types of political judgment situations and information presentation conditions. Several considerations are important in this regard. First, in the single candidate judgment condition that we constructed, subjects received a relatively small amount of information about a candidate on a single sheet of paper, such as they might in a campaign brochure. Often, however, candidate information is acquired at different points in time, and in different modalities. In such instances, knowledge of a candidate's party membership and personal appearance may be acquired separately from, and often prior to, information about the candidate's stands on specific issues. Under these conditions, categorical criteria may have more influence. (For

evidence of this in a different domain, see Hong and Wyer, 1990.)

Similar considerations arise in evaluating the results we obtained under comparative judgment conditions. In our study, subjects did not have access to the candidate information at the time they computed their judgments. Therefore, they were prevented from making direct comparisons of the candidates with respect to the judgment under consideration, and were required to base their judgments on their memory for the information they had received earlier. These conditions correspond to those that often exist outside the laboratory in which candidates are judged. This differs, however, from the results of studies in which all of the information is available to subjects at the time of judgment, as in studies reported by Ottati (1990) and Rosenberg et al. (1986). In these studies, subjects used a different strategy of direct comparison along all available information dimensions.

This would suggest the need for more research on the effects of temporal proximity. Social psychologists have found that temporal proximity (time, space and ordering) can affect decisions by changing information processing strategies. These strategy changes may increase and decrease the relative effects of different decisional criteria (see Ottati, Riggle, Wyer, Schwarz and Kuklinski, 1989, for an example of order and spacing effects; and Riggle, Budesheim and Wyer, 1990, for an example of timing effects).

One issue that we did not discuss directly is the role of

various subject/voter characteristics, most notably political sophistication. That political sophistication plays a role in voting decisions has been established by many scholars over various elections (e.g., Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes, 1960; Knight, 1985; Luskin, 1987; Sniderman et al., 1990). While the work herein focuses on the effects of information characteristics (context), we recognize the need to study the interaction between these informational characteristics and subject characteristics. For instance, it would be informative to test whether "less informed" subjects use heuristics under different contextual conditions than "well informed" subjects. As the amount of information available increases, less informed voters may default to the use of a party heuristic quicker than a well informed voter. Or, as ideological inconsistencies appear in a candidate's statements, the well informed voter may default to the use of a party heuristic quicker than the less informed voter (to whom the statements may not appear inconsistent).

Finally, it may be surprising that candidate image does not play a greater role in evaluations, as found in Ottati (1990) and Rosenberg et al. (1986). More generally, however, candidates outside the laboratory are seen on television or in person and, therefore, are likely to convey a more vivid image. The black and white photographs used in our experiments may not have created an image strong enough to affect evaluations based on memory. Under conditions where the photograph is available, or when a more vivid image is created, image related criteria may

exert more influence on judgments.

The results we obtained seem likely to generalize to an important subset of conditions in which subjects receive information about political candidates. Moreover, they provide a basis for further research that is designed specifically to evaluate the effects of additional factors such as delays in making judgments or the presentation of more vivid images with the party and issue information. Much is known about the general criteria which inform voters' decisions; now we can start to explore the actual processes used to make those decisions.

## Footnotes

1. Although the effects of gender on candidate evaluations are of course of considerable interest and importance (Sigelman, Thomas, Sigelman, & Ribich, 1986), an investigation of these effects was beyond the scope of the present investigation. We, therefore, restrict our attention to only male candidates.

2. The three hypotheses concerning stereotype use are not mutually exclusive. Each is a hypothesis about what type of stereotype use is expected under different contextual conditions. So, it is not the existence of these effects that is being tested, rather it is the conditions under which they occur.

3. It is, of course, conceivable that the physical attractiveness of the candidates we selected was confounded with other aspects of their appearance that convey competence and trustworthiness, and differences in these latter aspects may also have contributed to our results. Nevertheless, given the effects of physical attractiveness detected in other research (Dion et al., 1972), it seems reasonable to conclude that physical attractiveness per se is at least one, if not the only, determinant of the differences we observed. These results are also consistent with and extend upon Rosenberg et al.'s (1986) findings.

4. Subjects who described themselves as "Independent" were excluded from the analysis. This was done for simplicity in the ANOVA design and allowed us to look at decision strategies.



5. Subjects who agreed with the candidate on exactly 50% of the bills were excluded from further analyses.

6. Once this decision is reached, it should influence subsequent absolute judgments that subjects make of each candidate separately (cf. Schwarz and Wyer, 1985).

Table 1

Mean Ratings of the Three Most Attractive and Three Most  
Unattractive Candidates (Experiment 1)

Candidates	Attractive	Image	Trustworthy	Likable	Competent
Attractive (n=121)					
1	6.6	6.8	6.1	7.3	6.9
2	6.0	7.2	6.9	6.8	7.6
3	5.8	6.5	6.2	7.2	6.7
<u>M</u>	6.1	6.8	6.4	7.1	7.1
Unattractive (n=121)					
1	3.3	4.5	4.0	4.1	4.9
2	2.7	3.5	3.6	4.0	4.6
3	1.1	2.2	3.1	2.1	4.1
<u>M</u>	2.4	3.4	3.6	3.4	4.5

Table 2

Judgments of Candidates' Liberalness and Conservatism as a  
Function of Their Physical Attractiveness and Subjects' Own  
Political Ideology (Experiment 1)

Judgment	Attractive candidates	Unattractive candidates
Liberalness		
Liberal subjects ( $n = 36$ )	4.76	3.35
Conservative subjects ( $n = 54$ )	3.79	4.23
Conservatism		
Liberal subjects ( $n = 36$ )	5.74	6.53
Conservative subjects ( $n = 54$ )	6.68	5.70

Table 3

Mean Thermometer Ratings as a Function of Party Similarity, Issue Stand Similarity, and Candidate Image (Experiment 2)

Party

Same                      57.6    (88)

Different                54.5    (71)

Issue Stands

Similar                   67.7\*   (79)

Dissimilar               44.9\*   (80)

Image

Attractive                53.8    (78)

Unattractive             58.5    (81)

\* Means significantly differ a  $p < .05$ .

Note: The number of subjects in each cell is given in parentheses.

Table 4

Mean Thermometer Ratings for Candidates A and B as a Function of  
Party Similarity, Issue Stand Similarity, and Candidate Image  
(Experiment 3)

	Candidate A	Candidate B
Party		
Same	61.5* (243)	59.6* (209)
Different	51.7* (244)	49.8* (228)
•		
Issue Stands		
Similar	55.5 (225)	53.7 (189)
Dissimilar	57.4 (262)	55.0 (248)
Image		
Attractive	58.2 (243)	56.8 (221)
Unattractive	54.9 (244)	52.2 (216)

\* Means significantly different from one another at  $p < .05$ .

Note: Number of subjects in each cell are given in parentheses.

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Methoden der Analyse zeitbezogener Daten. Vortragsskripten der ZUMA-  
Arbeitstagung vom 25.09. - 05.10.79
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Schmidt  
Methodenbericht zum "ALLBUS 1980"
- 81/19      Manfred Küchler, Thomas P. Wilson, Don H. Zimmerman  
Integration von qualitativen und quantitativen Forschungsansätzen
- 82/03      Gerhard Arminger, Horst Busse, Manfred Küchler  
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- 82/08      Glenn R. Carroll  
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Zur Konstanz der Recallfrage
- 82/12      Rolf Porst  
"ALLBUS 1982" - Systematische Variablenübersicht und erste Ansätze zu  
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gramm
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Vergleichsstudien zum "ALLBUS 1980"
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Methodenbericht zum "ALLBUS 1982"
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dual differences and the general scale
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gramms und ihre inhaltliche Ausgestaltung im ALLBUS 1980 und ALLBUS  
1982
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Teil I + II
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Prestige-Skala

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- 84/04 Frank Faulbaum  
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Methodenbericht zum "ALLBUS 1984"
- 86/01 Dagmar Krebs  
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Die Test-Retest-Studie zum ALLBUS 1984 - Tabellenband

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The Impact of Frequency Range on Diagnostic Judgments

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- Ein Beispiel -
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- 88/14 Michael Schneid  
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und "THIS"
- 88/15 Norbert Schwarz, Bettina Scheuring  
Die Vergleichsrichtung bestimmt das Ergebnis  
von Vergleichsprozessen:  
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- 89/01 Norbert Schwarz, George F. Bishop, Hans-J. Hippler, Fritz Strack  
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And Telephone Surveys
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Sozialwissenschaften - ALLBUS 1988 -
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Happy and Mindless?  
Moods and the Processing of Persuasive Communications
- 89/06 Gerd Bohner, Norbert Schwarz und Stefan E. Hormuth  
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von Underwood und Froming

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CUI - Computerunterstützte Inhaltsanalyse  
Grundzüge und Auswahlbibliographie zu neueren Anwendungen
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Ein Dinosaurier für die historische Forschung
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The Saliency of Comparison Standards and the Activation of  
Social Norms: Consequences for Judgments of Happiness and their  
Communication
- 89/12 Jutta Kreiselmaier, Rolf Porst  
Methodische Probleme bei der Durchführung telefonischer  
Befragungen: Stichprobenziehung und Ermittlung von Zielpersonen,  
Ausschöpfung und Nonresponse, Qualität der Daten.
- 89/13 Rainer Mathes  
Modulsystem und Netzwerktechnik.  
Neuere inhaltsanalytische Verfahren zur Analyse von  
Kommunikationsinhalten.
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Der Interviewer im Pretest.  
Evaluation der Interviewerleistung und Entwurf eines  
neuen Pretestkonzepts. April 1989.
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Crime as a Social Indicator.
- 89/16 Ulrich Mueller  
Expanding the Theoretical and Methodological Framework of  
Social Dilemma Research
- 89/17 Hans-J. Hippler, Norbert Schwarz, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann  
Response Order Effects in Dichotomous Questions:  
The Impact of Administration Mode
- 89/18 Norbert Schwarz, Hans-J. Hippler, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann,  
Thomas Munkel  
Response Order Effects in Long Lists:  
Primacy, Recency, and Asymmetric Contrast Effects
- 89/19 Wolfgang Meyer  
Umweltberichterstattung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland
- 89/20 Michael Braun, Reiner Trometer  
ALLBUS Bibliographie (8. Fassung, Stand: 30.6. 1989)



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Gewichtungen zur Anpassung an Statusvariablen.  
Eine Untersuchung am ALLBUS 1986
- 89/22     Norbert Schwarz, Thomas Münkelt, Hans-J. Hippler  
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Contrast Effects as a Function of the Dimension  
Tapped by Preceding Questions
- 89/23     Norbert Schwarz, Andreas Bayer  
Variationen der Fragenreihenfolge als Instrument  
der Kausalitätsprüfung: Eine Untersuchung zur Neu-  
tralisationstheorie devianten Verhaltens
- 90/01     Norbert Schwarz, Fritz Strack, Hans-Peter Mai  
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Question Sequences:  
A Conversational Logic Analysis
- 90/02     Norbert Schwarz, Fritz Strack, Hans-J. Hippler, George Bishop  
The Impact of Administration Mode on Response Effects in  
Survey Measurement
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Processing of Persuasive Communications
- 90/04     Michael Braun, Reiner Trometer  
ALLBUS-Bibliographie 90
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